U.S. Denies Mideast Charge

LBJ's Brother-in-Law Called Arms Negotiator

By Joe Alex Morris Jr.
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BEIRUT, Lebanon, Jan. 20 President Johnson's brother-in-law was portrayed by several newspapers here today as a super-secret arms negotiator on his way to Jordan to wrap up a mystery order for supersonic fighter aircraft.

The United States Embassy called the reports "ridiculous" and said Mr. Johnson's brother-in-law, Antonio J. Taylor of Santa Fe, was going to Jordan as a special consultant on marketing of handicraft products. Taylor worked on a similar marketing project in South America.

Taylor's role as a handicraft consultant was reported by two of Lebanon's biggest papers with an air of obvious disbelief.

Jordan is currently negotiating with Britain and France for some 30 supersonic jet fighter aircraft. A key part of the deal is financing the purchase, which will amount to almost $100 million. Jordanian officials claim—despite official U.S. denials—that Washington will pay at least part of the amount.

One newspaper reported the U.S. Embassy here was "tight-lipped" about Taylor's real mission. An Embassy official countered that "we simply didn't have much information about this guy."

The same paper reported that Taylor arrived here en route to Jordan "in a veil of secrecy," and quoted him as saying he was "not at liberty to disclose anything."

This apparently referred to the fact that he did not arrive on the plane on which he was expected.

The newspaper also dug up some unnamed diplomatic sources, who purportedly said the Jordanian jet deal was "the only problem that may call for the dispatch of a man of Mr. Taylor's caliber to the Jordanian capital."

Taylor said the Beirut stories were nonsense.

"This is the most innocent and least political of all government undertakings," he said. "I'm here to work with simple people and seek a means to introduce their products into other parts of the world."

Asked what he thought Mrs. Johnson would think when she read the story, he said "she's going to say get him home before he gets us all in trouble.

"I'm only being facetious," he added hastily.